

MIDDLEBURY SKIING-ONCE REMEMBERED

As young children, we grew up thinking that the law was the law and that history happened just as we read about it in our school books. As adults, we now know that the law is what someone says it is, at a fleeting moment in time and that there may be many versions of any historical incident. So what follows is clearly what I remember and in advance, I take this opportunity to apologize if my own memories do not line up with yours. As with some of you, age has taken its toll and while I can remember that we used Ostbye cross country wax on our downhill skis at the Dartmouth carnival in 1947, I cannot remember what I had for lunch today. Incidentally, we were quick to learn that we had made a very poor choice of wax!

I was introduced to skiing when a set of peculiar circumstances brought me into contact with some wonderful people at the Mt. Greylock Ski Club in Pittsfield, MA. The circumstances that introduced us spawned a lifelong love affair, one chapter of which occurred in Vermont when I won a day's instruction at Pico Peak from one of the nicest gentlemen whoever put on a pair of skis. On a crisp sunny day, probably in 1941 or 1942, Karl Acker gave ten of us a full day of instruction and was most ably assisted by his proteges, Joe Jones and Neal Robinson. I had never seen such skiing and thought for certain that these were the three best in all of the world. In retrospect I still don't think that judgment was far off the mark and this incident is significant only because Joe Jones represented my first link to Middlebury College. I next saw Joe when I arrived at Camp Hale in Colorado to join the Tenth Mountain Division.

Joe Jones was the only name out there that I recognized although I was soon to discover that our tiny smoke filled valley was filled with stars of great magnitude. From a distance I saw Walter Praeger and learned that he had won a Diamond A.K., which at that time was probably the greatest trophy known to the skiing world. During the next two years I was to meet other first class skiers like Don Henderson, Steve Knowlton, Curt Chase and a girl named, Mary Jane Griffith, who actually lived in Sun Valley, which in our eyes was akin to living in Heaven. Sun Valley actually had a thing called a chairlift which carried people to the top of the mountain and they didn't have to climb! I also met a wonderful guy named, Tom Creamer, who represented my next link in the chain to Middlebury. Incidentally, I remember that Tom borrowed a pair of poles from me which have not yet been returned! I remember that Tom was a handsome guy and a very stylish skier. Things being what they were in those days, the war began to take over and we didn't do a lot of skiing during the winter of 1944. In 1946 I was working for General Electric in Pittsfield, MA, and when they went on strike I took a ski trip into the north country and lo and behold I bumped into Tom Creamer who was then captain of the Middlebury team participating in a race at Stowe, VT. Tom told me that I just had to come to Middlebury, because Joe Jones, Phil Deane and Don Henderson were coming and we would have a great team. Suffice to say, that I sent off for an application, found someone to take me to a Middlebury alumni dinner in Albany where I met President Stratton and used my moment with Sam to say that I knew Tom Creamer and Joe Jones hoping that the association would suggest that I was as good as they were,

(which I clearly was not), and went home to await my fate. Apparently, Sam took the bait, because a week or two later I was admitted, not knowing until years later how badly Sam wanted to take a ski team to his Alma Mater in Hanover that would just beat the hell out of them. When I arrived at Middlebury in September 1946, I discovered that Joe Jones was indeed here running the ski area and coaching the women. Don Henderson was also here and would soon teach me the Berlin High School alma mater. I also knew that until snow came, I could pretend that I was as good as anyone and I learned that a tough young athlete named, Bobo Sheehan, was the coach. For me ~~that~~ fall was to mark the beginning of Middlebury skiing which would for years and years, perhaps forever, carry the indelible stamp of Robert R. Sheehan. At this point, it seems appropriate to ^{rely upon} ~~suggest~~ that Bobo was really not starting from scratch. As we moved around New England we became acquainted with some of Middlebury's skiing history. I learned about and had an opportunity to meet Cy Shelvy (the captain of Middlebury's first ski team), Dick Hubbard, Ike Townsend and others and I heard many stories about the legendary, Eddie Gignac. I learned also that Tom Creamer had married a girl named, Becky Fraser, who came from Bridgewater, VT and who was probably Middlebury's first olympic athlete when she earned a berth on the 1948 Olympic Ski Team. So Middlebury had a ski program, but just as skiing throughout the world exploded after World War II, skiing at Middlebury was to develop in ways which were to set the style for colleges and universities everywhere. When one works at a college or university as I have done for the

last 30 years, one sees a lot of first class athletes (you see a lot of second class athletes too!). I think of Bobo as a first class athlete with a great athletic temperament and it was clearly his temperament more than any reservoir of technical expertise that enabled him to build the great program he developed.

In 1947 Bobo knew very little about any of us but he experimented with various combinations and put together the first Middlebury team ever to win the Eastern Intercollegiate Ski Association Championship. It is an old trophy - possibly it is still around here someplace and it was usually won by Dartmouth or UNH and occasionally by McGill. To the best of my knowledge it was awarded to Middlebury for the first time at the championship meet which was hosted by McGill and held at St. Saver. As I recall, and I don't remember much past the early part of the evening, there was a bit of celebrating done in Old Montreal that night. In those days, Bobo could lead by example. He frequently beat the hell out of us when he raced against us at the "Open" meets on Sundays. He could be a driver, or a politician. He could be a father, a brother, or one of the boys. He was only a little bit older than we were, but there was never much doubt but that he was the boss and whatever his relationships were with the members of the teams that were to follow, I think we of the late 40's always felt that there was a never to be duplicated bond forged between all of us. Staying on at Middlebury and having had the privilege of working with the women's teams for about 10 years, I continued to witness at firsthand,

Bobo's expert handling of his skiers. More than anyone else, he represented Middlebury skiing throughout the country and became, in fact, a major spokesman for intercollegiate skiing as it began to develop. When Bo left coaching to enter the business world, the coaching ranks thinned appreciably. There will be technicians, cajolers, organizers, and politicians who will continue to carry the sport forward but Bobo is one of a kind, a one time guy in the right place at the right time and with the support of Sam Stratton, Dr. Ross, Ike French and Carroll Rikert, he not only laid the foundation of Middlebury skiing, but he raised the flag which still flies so proudly and we must all be grateful to him for that.